

August 1, 2024

RE: Brian Wilder

Dear Judge Mehalchick:

I have known Brian since he was 2 years old. His mother and I have been very close friends for more than 50 years. Brian and I share the same birthdate (January 2) and perhaps that is part of our connection. He has called me Aunt Jeanie his whole life. I went through Brian's Mom and Dad's divorce and then witnessed his stepfather's abuse (condescending verbal abuse). Brian has never been athletic or muscular. He was pushed around a lot.

I've watched Brian grow from a toddler to start school, babysat for him and offered counsel to him when he ask me for help. He came and spent many summers (a week at a time) when I was living in another part of the state. We had so much fun going to waterslides, swimming pools, going for walks, shopping, strolling through the zoo, etc. I didn't have children yet and enjoyed being a "Mom/Aunt" to Brian.

Brian was fun loving, eager to please and when you show him support or encouragement, he would go above and beyond to achieve any task given to him. I know he did not receive much encouragement in his home. To my knowledge, he never brought a friend to his home to visit. He never knew how they might be treated. His mother married for the second time. The stepfather seemed ok at first but he was so totally different than Brian. His expectations of Brian I felt were unreasonable. Instead of supporting Brian for his good qualities, he belittled him for not being athletic, rough and tumble, etc. His biological father was an alcoholic and really never paid Brian much attention.

As Brian grew through his teenage years, he struggled to find friends who would accept him as he is. He began stuttering in his routine speech. He was left with friends and family a lot while his mom and stepfather would go out. His younger sister was born when Brian was a teenager and he adored Jessie. She got a lot more attention from his mother and stepfather so he was on the fringes unless they needed him to babysit. When Jessie was about 8 years old, she was diagnosed with MD. It was devastating to Brian to watch his sister deteriorate over the next several years. She passed away in her 20s. Prior to Jessie passing away, Brian's mom divorced abusive stepfather and found her soulmate in husband number 3. They were made for each other but dedicated all their time to each other. Leaving very little time for any kids (from either side of the marriage).

While Brian was in high school, he was still dealing with the abusive stepfather and the years were most difficult and his grades sank from As to some Fs. He's smart enough, but just didn't care enough anymore to try. My husband went to the JC High School and spoke to counselors to find out what could be done so he would graduate with his class. He took additional make up classes and was able to achieve graduation on time. He just needed some attention, motivation and guidance from adults.

After graduation, he struggled to find work to support himself and connect to friends. Again, never bringing anyone to his home. His mother helped him financially at times. As an adult, (I think he was about 30 years old) he became involved in the Young JC organization and made good friends his age. He later served as President of the Young JCs, a fairly large civic group in Jefferson City, and led the

organization with pride. He did a very good job and really (for the first time) gained confidence in himself.

I'm sorry to say that through my moves with my husband and daughter, I didn't have a lot of contact with Brian other than an occasional phone call or card. We always spoke on our birthdays. He was busy trying to make it on his own and I became a busy mother, working full time, going to school at night, and making my way in the business world. Life Happens!

Fast forward to Brian in his late 40's and he was making it on his own. He has a close friend (platonic) who found herself pregnant and marriage was not even a consideration. He was her friend and confidant through the pregnancy and helped to raise Cam. He was a very good dad to Cam. Attended all his school activities, special events, etc.

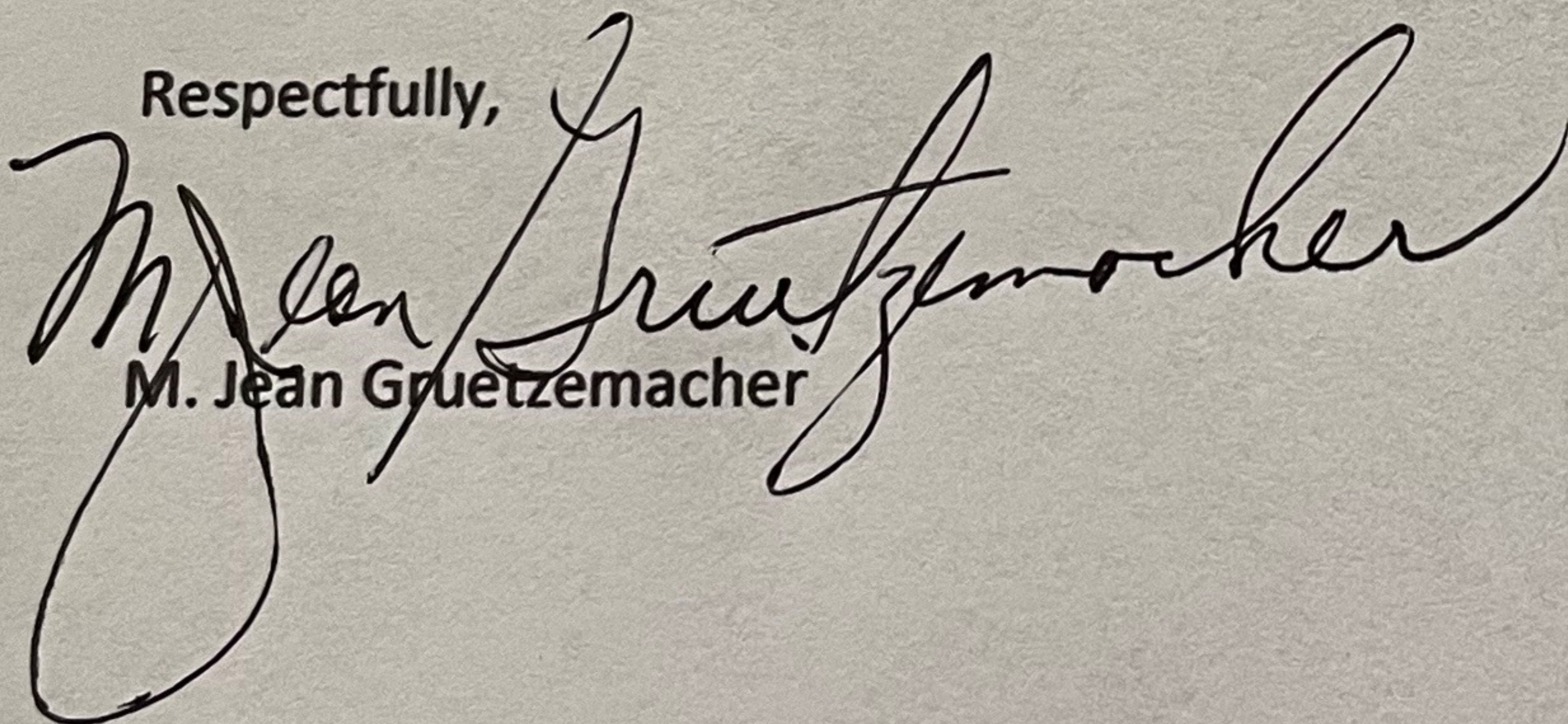
When his most recent stepfather became ill and passed away in 2020, Brian's mother fell apart....both emotionally and physically. Brian stepped forward and literally kept things on task for her. He saw her almost daily and played a very important role in helping her realize and accept she had become an alcoholic. He had to make very difficult decisions to make on her behalf and many were not met favorably....but they had to be made. I'm happy to say that she is in recovery and I believe Brian had a lot to do with her recovery. During that time, she also began having multiple health problems, was hospitalized several times and she now must use a walker.

Brian has made poor choices and he is remorseful and realizes the consequences.

I have an undergraduate degrees in marketing and finance with a MBA. My work background includes nearly 30 years as a professional fundraiser and the last 7 years of my professional career I was VP of Mercy Health Foundation.

I will be happy to discuss Brian or answer any questions. My email address is: mjgruetzemaker@gmail.com and my phone number is 417-894-2245.

Respectfully,


M. Jean Gruetzemacher